The purpose of this memo is to provide a written summary of the philosophy department’s assessment-related activities for the 2006-2007 academic year. It presupposes that the reader is familiar with the memo that we submitted to the Program Review Committee on June 9th, 2006, which contains a more complete statement of our program goals and related topics.

The philosophy department’s program assessment activities during the past academic year were focused on two of our program goals and two of our courses. In the fall semester of 2006, I implemented assessment instruments in both my section of PHI 6 (Philosophical Perspectives) and my RS 103 course (Christian Apologetics) to gather data for the purpose of measuring our progress toward the achievement of both of our currently active program goals. During the spring semester (when I was on sabbatical), David Vander Laan employed an assessment tool in his section of PHI 6 for the same purpose.

Our two active program goals are as follows:

1. Students who take “Philosophical Perspectives,” the philosophy department’s “Common Context” GE course, will be able to articulate (at the end of the course) what the contribution of philosophy is to their Christian liberal arts education.

2. Students who take a course to satisfy the “Reasoning Abstractly” GE requirement (such as Christian Apologetics) will demonstrate increased facility with abstract philosophical reasoning.
Fall 2006

Goal #1 and Philosophical Perspectives

As in past semesters in my PHI 6 courses, I had my 34 students write a two-part essay on the topic of the contribution of philosophy to their Christian liberal arts education and to their construction of a Christian worldview (after reading an essay that addresses these topics). My benchmark for this exercise is that at least 80% of the student essays demonstrate a very good to excellent grasp of the concepts of “worldview,” “philosophy,” and “Christian liberal arts education” (as defined in our 6/9/2006 report to the Program Review Committee). They wrote the first part of this essay on October 18, 2006. The second part of the essay consisted in their reflections on these same questions at the end of the semester (on December 4th, 2006). In this second part, they commented on the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with what they had written in the first part (in light of what they had learned in the course in the interim).

The results of this

Goal #2 and Christian Apologetics

In RS 103 (Christian Apologetics) I employed an in-class argument recognition exercise that tests students’ ability to distinguish argumentative from non-argumentative parts of passages and to distinguish premises from conclusions in arguments. Though only 43% of the students who participated in the pre-test toward the beginning of the semester were able to identify both the conclusion and premises of an argument contained in the passage I distributed, 71% of these students were able to identify both the conclusion and premises of an argument contained in a different passage (from the same essay) that I used in the post-test toward the end of the semester. When compared to the results of the fall semester of 2005 (when there was an improvement of 25% from pre-test to post-test), the results of the fall semester of 2006 show more improvement (28%).

Some things we learned from this exercise during that semester that will likely lead to changes in subsequent semesters (including this fall semester) include the following: (a) most of the students who did not identify both premises and conclusion on a test were nonetheless able to recognize one or the other of these argument components, so we should begin keeping track of these partial successes as well; (b) we have still not met our benchmark of 80% of our students being successful on the post-test, so we should consider giving the students more time for this exercise, choosing arguments that are somewhat less complicated, and/or providing more advance instruction about argument recognition and analysis; and (c) since our benchmark focuses only on the percentage of students who are successful on the post-test, we are not attuned at this point to the degree of improvement between pre-test and post-test, so we
should consider adding this extra dimension to our benchmark for this assessment tool.

**Spring 2007**

This past spring, a large sample of students in David Vander Laan’s section of Philosophical Perspectives (PHI 006-2) were asked a question on the relationship between the Christian liberal arts and the notion of vocation. 100% of the students scored 80% or better on this question, with an average score of 90%. (David didn't teach PHI 6 in the fall.).

The data are in David’s office file cabinet (under "Current Semester Grades").

David says that these results are consistent with results from previous semesters.